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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5321
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3625
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5246
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0107
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0781
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4368
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9782
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7073
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0102
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3937
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001159

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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SUBJECT: DEFENSE SECRETARY DEFENDS SRI LANKAN POLICIES WITH
A/S BLAKE

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Classified By: DCM VALERIE FOWLER. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a December 8 meeting with A/S Blake, Sri Lankan Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa discussed accountability and reconciliation; the State of Emergency; disarmament of ex-combatants and paramilitary groups; reconstruction in the North; rehabilitation of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ex-combatants; LTTE child soldiers; access to LTTE ex-combatants for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); potential Sri Lankan contributions to peacekeeping operations and to U.S.-led coalition efforts, and Sri Lankan military expansion plans. A/S Blake noted that ICRC access to LTTE ex-combatants and GSL action to hold members of the military accountable for any human rights abuses or possibly war crimes would be important for the normalization of our military-to-military relations. END SUMMARY.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND RECONCILIATION

12. (C) A/S Blake emphasized American and international expectations and concerns about accountability and reconciliation, and urged the GSL to make every effort to show it had investigated and when appropriate held accountable members of the military alleged to have committed human rights abuses or war crimes. Rajapaksa asserted that the military was taking action, and -- in response to A/S Blake's request -- agreed to provide the United States with a copy of the Ministry of Defense's input into the GSL response to the European Union's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)-Plus report. (NOTE: The Embassy subsequently received a copy of the "Observations of the Government of Sri Lanka in respect of the 'Report on the Findings of the Investigation with Respect to the Effective Implementation of certain human rights Conventions in Sri Lanka'." The Observations were essentially a narrative defense of the GSL position, appeared

to have little input from the Ministry of Defense, and contained no statistics on military investigations of potential criminal acts. The Embassy has continued to try to get the report on military investigations that the Defense Secretary promised to A/S Blake, as well as to Ambassador Butenis, but thus far has been unsuccessful. END NOTE.)

SECURITY AND RECONSTRUCTION

13. (C) A/S Blake suggested that lifting the State of Emergency would help demonstrate GSL progress addressing long-term human rights concerns. Speaking hours after Parliament had extended the State of Emergency for another month, Rajapaksa replied the provisions remained necessary, primarily to keep in detention the 1,000 or so hard-core LTTE cadres. He said the GSL was trying to figure out a way ahead to process the detainees within the judicial system, but if the Emergency were lifted now, the GSL would have to release them. Rajapaksa emphasized that most of the other security restrictions had already been eased or lifted, including restrictions on air travel, transportation, and those related to the fishing industry.

14. (C) In response to A/S Blake's suggestion that the GSL disarm paramilitary groups in the North as it had done in the East, Rajapaksa noted that the government had disarmed all militant groups, including those in Vavuniya. He said every day the security forces are collecting arms and ammunition, uncovering many hidden caches from information provided by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and LTTE ex-combatants. He dismissed recent media reports of a Tamil group identifying itself as a Peoples' Liberation Army and calling

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for an independent homeland for Tamils. Rajapaksa said the GSL has excellent security controls in the Eastern Province, and had seen no indication of any such group.

15. (C) Rajapaksa said the GSL had encouraged the Tamil diaspora to take a greater role in reconstruction. He said that there was a critical need for construction of housing and hoped the diaspora would provide assistance as they had done after the devastation caused by the 2004 tsunami in the North, the South, and in the Eastern Province. A/S Blake mentioned his trip to the IDP camps and resettled areas in the North. He noted few patients in the hospital in the camps. He said the area around Madhu Church had not appeared as damaged by the war as expected. He said the resettled IDPs had expressed the need for two types of assistance, namely more computers and more bicycles, adding that the IDPs had told him that the Sri Lankan Army had passed out a lot of bicycles to them, but they would like more. Rajapaksa responded that the Army had carried out most of the clearing, reconstruction and renovation around the Madhu Church.

ICRC AND EX-COMBATANTS

16. (C) In response to A/S Blake's support for the ICRC's mandate, Rajapaksa said the ICRC continued to visit LTTE cadres in prisons and there was no problem with ICRC visiting the LTTE ex-combatant camps. Rajapaksa said he had no issue with ICRC performing its monitoring mission. He said it was inappropriate, however, for the ICRC to interfere in the rehabilitation programs that were the purview of International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the GSL. He blamed the ICRC for undermining international donor support for IOM rehabilitation programs, and encouraged A/S Blake to discuss the problem with IOM representatives. Blake clarified that the ICRC was not undermining such support. Rather, by granting ICRC periodic access, the GSL could improve prospects for international support. Rajapaksa highlighted that the LTTE child soldiers' education program at Hindu College in Ratmalana was going well. He said that during his recent visit to the facility, he had spoken to the

children and that most wanted to continue their studies and rejoin their families. Rajapaksa noted that there were two or three cases of children with no families and that one child thought his parents had gone to London, but no one had been able to trace them.

MILITARY MISSIONS

17. (C) Rajapaksa discussed his future plans for the Sri Lanka military to participate in UN Peacekeeping missions. Rajapaksa said he could make 10,000 peacekeepers available "today" for deployment on UN missions. Although Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) aircraft were also available, deployments were impractical given the unaffordable up-front costs the GSL would incur just to deploy them. Regarding participation in maritime coalition operations to counter piracy and the trafficking of persons and narcotics, Rajapaksa noted that Sri Lanka would be very open to the idea. Regarding reported plans to expand the military, Rajapaksa said he had instructed the military to develop a plan for expanding maritime capabilities, with the primary intent of preventing the LTTE from once again smuggling arms and ammunition into Sri Lanka. He said the Sri Lankan Navy would be critical to stopping any LTTE smuggling operations, and would also play a significant role in countering the LTTE's human trafficking operations throughout the region to destinations such as Australia and Canada.

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AFGHANISTAN

18. (C) A/S Blake raised the possibility of Sri Lanka contributing to U.S.-led coalition operations in Afghanistan, noting that would be a significant step in support of improving military-to-military engagement. Rajapaksa replied that contributing forces for combat operations right now would be too politically sensitive during the current election season in Sri Lanka. He added that the GSL would have to consider seriously the implications for its Muslim minority as well as the danger of drawing the ire of groups like Al-Qaida and Lashkar-e-Taiba by becoming a force provider. He said a possible alternative for Sri Lanka might be to provide training assistance to Afghan security forces under the auspices of a non-governmental organization or private company. He recalled a local precedent for this approach, dating back to 1985-1986 when a South Africa-based company had provided security assistance to Sri Lanka in the early years of the war with the LTTE. He said the company had provided military and security experts from a host of countries, including the United Kingdom, other Commonwealth nations, and even some Russians. For four or five years, the company was based in Jaffna and had trained Sri Lankan pilots and taught infantry tactics, including close quarters combat skills. He said that while the South African company had not participated in combat operations, it had closely monitored Sri Lankan military operations, assisting in de-briefing patrols and conducting after action reviews.

LTTE LINKS TO ERITREA AND LET

19. (C) Rajapaksa briefed that the GSL knew of five planes that the LTTE had purchased in Eritrea, where they remained. The LTTE had also established boat-building operations in Eritrea, he added. The Eritrean government has rebuffed GSL attempts to open a diplomatic mission. He claimed that LTTE operatives also helped train Somali terrorists in Eritrea. Rajapaksa outlined that the LTTE employed middlemen in India, Philippines, Eritrea, Thailand and Malaysia, and used Singapore as the financial hub. The brokers usually married a native, started a business, and bribed officials to facilitate deals. The shipments originated in North Korea, and usually contained Chinese-origin goods.

¶10. (C) A/S Blake warned that Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which has used Nepal and Bangladesh as staging posts to attack India, could next turn to Sri Lanka. Rajapaksa related that the GSL had arrested two men transiting Sri Lanka to Nepal based on information provided by India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). The GSL has since turned them over to RAW. Rajapaksa noted that the GSL has assigned separate officers to watch for extremists. A/S Blake suggested that the GSL exchange further information about LTTE networks with U.S. counter-terrorism experts.

BUTENIS